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Clarid Vision: H.D. on the Threshold of Theory

Antoine Cazé

Introduction: “Two lenses”

1 In her path-breaking study of Hilda Doolittle’s prose works, *Penelope’s Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.’s Fiction*, Susan Stanford Friedman describes the American writer’s essay entitled *Notes on Thought and Vision* as her earliest attempt (1919) at formulating an alternative modernist poetics, purporting to counterbalance (if not counter) the emphatically male, distinctly Poundian, kind of manifesto so clearly exemplified by the Imagist, Vorticist and Futurist texts of the 1910s, all characterized by a theoretical energy that often verges on the aggressive. By contrast, Friedman argues, H.D. “establishes a revelatory poetics akin to but different from Joycean epiphanies and Woolfian moments of being.” Thus, she not only “defines a modernist gynopoetic” but “also performs it.” (Friedman, 1990, 11) Friedman’s focus is clearly on the fragmentary nature of H.D.’s radically nonstandard text—a creative prose essay whose genre and gender hybrid offers, the critic contends, an early and remarkable example of *écriture féminine*. She concludes her analysis by substantively linking the marginal, and simultaneously liminal, quality of H.D.’s experiment in theoretical writing with the blurring of gender that constitutes one of this text’s primary tenets. I certainly agree with Friedman when she argues that H.D.’s *Notes on Thought and Vision* may be seen as an “exemplary signpost for H.D.’s theorizations of modernity,” helping us to understand H.D. herself as— in keeping with the overarching metaphor of Penelope’s Web she uses—“the weaver whose (pro)creative agency embodies a modernity to which women implicitly have privileged access.” (*Ibid.*, 18)

2 However, I would like to place H.D.’s “theorization” of modernity in a different light and, in fact, to use the *light* metaphor (in all possible senses of this word) as a key to understanding the relationship between theory, aesthetics and liminality that H.D. seeks to establish in her work. In her account of *Notes on Thought and Vision*, Friedman

herself draws an interesting parallel between this text and Virginia Woolf's "Modern Fiction," an essay actually written in the same year as H.D.'s. A quote from Woolf's text might serve to illustrate the shift in theoretical focus I wish to perform here, all the more so since the metaphor of light used by Woolf strongly echoes H.D.'s own preferred set of images, in a way I hope to show is central to the question of the American writer's theoretical gaze. For according to Woolf: "Life is not a series of gig lamps systematically arranged, but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." By Woolf's account, life is not made up of separate events which it would be the work of consciousness to detach from the flux of experience; on the contrary, life appears to be this unsystematic flux itself. It is not distinct from the very conditions that make it possible and make it appear what it is. Underpinning Woolf's description—whose visual dimension is crucially reinforced by her use of the light metaphor—is a vital shift in conception: as she theorizes about fiction writing, Woolf turns away from the separateness induced by a "systematic arrangement" of thoughts which would illuminate experience from without, and favors instead an "enveloping" contact with the substance of experience itself. In what follows, therefore, focusing for the most part on the very bold theoretical propositions H.D. makes in *Notes on Thought and Vision*,[1] I wish to claim that H.D., like Woolf, radically shifted the burden of theory from a conceptual to a perceptual dimension, and simultaneously from a divisive to an integrative style and view. As a result, the form of liminality I would like to examine here, while undeniably tied with questions of gender, has more to do with a change in kinds, or *genres*, of theory.[2]

3 Focusing on this change could allow one to take an alternative view of how to (re)construct the narrative of Modernism—i.e., less heroically and epically than suggested by the oppositional stance of manifestoes, and more lyrically, by repositioning the writing subject at the heart of her own theoretical discourse, notably including the autobiographical dimension of experience not as anecdotal, but as a modal necessity for theorizing. Implicit in this reading of H.D.'s experimental theory, therefore, is the idea of a *meta-modernism* which—as has already been explored by Clément Oudart in his book, *Les Métamorphoses du modernisme* (2010)—relies primarily on establishing zones of overlap and continuity between writers and writing modes, rather than on valuing the rhetoric of rupture and innovation as the major meta-discourse of, and about, modernity (see Oudart, 2010, 25-9). I hope to indicate that the nexus of *relations* characterizing H.D.'s works—whether they be poetic, fictional, theoretical, or a combination of all three—contributes to creating an interstitial space in which an alternative narrative of modernity may thrive. This narrative—or fluctuating experience, rather—has everything to do with a pervasive re-subjectivation of discourse, of the kind which Peter Nicholls understands to be at work even in H.D.'s early imagist poetry, contra Pound's precepts of objective clarity and arresting imagery:

> If Pound's Imagism is all about modes of differentiation, H.D.'s would seem to be preoccupied with what seems other but turns out to be the same. The relation of self to world is a thoroughly mobile one, in the same sense that H.D. regarded Sappho as 'the sea itself, breaking and tortured and torturing, but never broken.' This doubleness destroys that autonomy of the self which is so much prized by the 'Men of 1914' [...]. (Nicholls, 1995, 200)[3]

4 As shall be argued here, *Notes on Thought and Vision* offers a strikingly unorthodox example of how fluctuating, even uncertain, H.D.'s use of theory may be, precisely in order to showcase this "relation of self to world"—literally, to make it visible through a glass pane. Indeed, the fragments which make up this essay of sorts are "filled with dualisms that seem to split experience at all levels" (Gelpi in H.D., 1982, 12), but this is only a preliminary for H.D. to "account for those mysterious moments in which the polarities seem to fall away" (*ibid.*). Such a tension between the clarity of analysis (thought) on the one hand, and on the other hand the fluidity, or blur, of a vision that nonetheless remains heavily premised on some form of transparency, suggests that H.D. attempts to describe a continuity between the two. In her effort at coming to terms with what vision and thought mean to her, H.D.'s notes emphasize—through their repetitive, almost hypnotic quality—this essential continuity between body and mind, describing it as a flux of energy that binds together the mental act of thinking and the sensual act of perceiving. The visual trope pervading her text serves to *illustrate* this theoretical stance—to bring it into shining focus—so that she can envision (as one would say "embody") thinking and make it a nexus of relations:

> The over-mind is like a lens of an opera-glass. When we are able to use this over-mind lens, the whole world of vision is open to us.

5 I have said that the over-mind is a lens. I should say more exactly that the love-mind and the over-mind are two lenses. When these lenses are properly adjusted, focused, they bring the world of vision into consciousness. The two work separately, perceive separately, yet make one picture. (H.D., 1982, 23)

I. "A set of super-feelings"

6 "Theory," as the etymology of the word tells us from the Greek *θεωρειν* "to observe, to contemplate," is closely related to sight and seeing. The kind of contemplation it entails usually involves a distance, a perspective, an *abstraction* (almost a retreat) in which the seeing subject is detached from the things seen in order to grasp them as objectively and fully as possible. By contrast, what might be termed an "aesthetics of theory" involves some mediation by which theory, be it speculative thinking or the devising of a set of principles, becomes a form of contact *through* sight—a sensitive (*aisthesis*) form of thinking in which the nature of the distance between the perceiving subject and the perceived object is not transparently taken for granted but rather focuses all the attention of the writer/theorist. When theory itself becomes the object of an aesthetic elaboration, as is the case of *Notes on Thought and Vision*, this distance becomes palpable, a substance endowed with clairvoyant properties.[4] As H.D. puts it in an early paragraph of her meditative essay, such a calling into question of the distance imparted by theoretical thinking involves a reconfiguration of the relationship between the mind and the body; this implies a spatial dislocation that, in turn, entails a radical change in the view one may take of the physical and spiritual/intellectual worlds, respectively: "When a creative scientist, artist or philosopher has been for some hours or days intent on his work, his mind often takes on an almost physical character. That is, his mind becomes his real body. His over-mind becomes his brain." (H.D., 1982, 18). The remarkable description she then makes, just a few paragraphs later, of this progressive transformation—which she calls, quite esoterically, "the jelly-fish experience" as "a set

of super-feelings" takes control of the creative mind (19)—precisely tries to capture the nature of an aesthetic contact which could embody both distance and proximity:

> That over-mind seems a cap, like water, transparent, fluid yet with definite body, contained in a definite space. It is like a closed sea-plant, jelly-fish or anemone.
> Into that over-mind, thoughts pass and are visible like fish swimming under clear water.
> [...]
> I should say—to continue this jelly-fish metaphor—that long feelers reached down and through the body, that these stood in the same relation to the nervous system as the over-mind to the brain or intellect.
> There is, then, a set of super-feelings. These feelings extend out and about us; as the long, floating tentacles of the jelly-fish reach out and about him. They are not different material, extraneous, as the physical arms and legs are extraneous to the gray matter of the directing brain. The super-feelers are part of the super-mind, as the jelly-fish feelers are the jelly-fish itself, elongated in fine threads. (18-9)

7 In this literally aesthetic (touching) process, the subject/object becomes a totality of reciprocal relations rather than the locus of a dichotomous confrontation of which language bears the trace (*sub* vs. *ob*). It should be emphasized that, from a textual point of view, this nexus of relations is variously identified by H.D. in compound formulations, which seem to echo Woolf's idea of life as a "semi-transparent envelope" not only in their meaning but even more clearly in their visual aspect: "over-mind," "sea-plant," "super-feelings," "super-feelers," and obviously "jelly-fish" itself. Thus, a jelly-fish, with its constitutive hyphen, is a composite being, made mostly of *relations* whose limits are unclear, blurring in the very word the separation between the "jelly" component and the "fish" component, in an echo of the loose demarcation between the mind and the body, joined by elongated, "fine threads."

8 This intermediary dimension, which defines simultaneously the kind of theorizing H.D. invents here and the detail of her language, was to later characterize the largely (or perhaps, loosely) psychoanalytical exploration of the mind that she carried out throughout her life. Thus, for instance, in the short story entitled "Pontikonisi (Mouse Island)," which H.D. published under the pseudonym Rhoda Peter in the July-September 1932 issue of *Pagany*, and whose plot revolves around the "galvanized projection" of a mental image, the heroine (called Madelon, the author's thinly-veiled autobiographical double) describes her own state of mind and body with an even more complex, doubly compound image, directly inspired from *Notes on Thought and Vision*: "She had her formula, she was platinum sheet-metal over jelly-fish." (H.D., 1932, 7) Madelon hopes to discover one day what this "formula" means, or hides, with the help of triply hyphenated "specialists in the thought-under-the-thought" (*Ibid.*). Typical of H.D. here, is the commingling of several strands of theoretical thinking that underpin the exploration of her character's (and her own) mind. In reading such texts—fiction or essays—, one indeed gets the impression of being introduced to some kind of hyphenated "theorization," half-way between psychoanalysis and the occult. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, to encounter the same kind of hyphenated words in *Tribute to Freud*, H.D.'s hybrid memoir of her Vienna sessions with "The Professor," as she called him. This is particularly the case whenever she comes close to, but never quite at the heart of, the core experiences structuring her psyche, which she calls "The series of shadow- or of light-pictures I saw projected on the wall of a hotel bedroom in the Ionian island of Corfu" (H.D., 1974, 41): here, "the picture-writing on the wall" (44) becomes "a guiding sign-post" (46) from which she cannot "break the sustained crystal-

gazing stare" (47); "There had been writings-on-walls before" (50), she insists, "really a high-powered *idea*, simply over-stressed, *over-thought*, you might say" (51, author's emphases)—the latter adjective sounding like an echo of the "over-mind" so central in *Notes on Thought and Vision*.[5] The seemingly superfluous hyphens of such formulations are in fact graphic traces of the aesthetic process by which H.D. blurs the theoretical distance that her self-analysis might impart to her lived experience. Affecting the text, their stitches reveal the continuity H.D. means to create between body and mind, vision and thought; they materialize the liminal space in which she inscribes her texts, delineating an internal borderline along whose continuum she sets up all kinds of hybrid forms.

9 I would therefore unhesitatingly concur with Adalaide Morris who, in her reading of the long essay H.D. published in the experimental film magazine *Close Up* to accompany the movie *Borderline* (1930, reprinted in Donald, 1998, 221-36), emphasizes the writer's critical and theoretical use of the concept of "borderline" and shows how it was substantively transformed by her to accommodate the psychic (clairvoyant) alongside the psychoanalytic: "while playing on all the term [projection]'s other nuances, the pamphlet shuns its psychoanalytic denotation, resituating the borderline so that it lies not between the neurotic and the psychotic but between the neurotic and the psychic." (Morris, 2003, 107). This indeterminacy is essential to understand H.D.'s aestheticization of theory. It may be symbolized by the already quoted mention, in *Notes*, of three kinds of "theoreticians" in one and the same breath: "creative scientist, artist or philosopher" (H.D., 1982, 18). Just as the adverb "almost"—used here by H.D. to describe the workings of this composite figure's mind ("his mind takes on an *almost* physical character")—stresses the somewhat painful transition, or even transport, from mind to body by stranding one on the threshold of the other, so the proliferating hyphens are as many signposts signaling the liminal space in which thought and vision jell to produce not so much a crystal-clear image as a sense of an enveloping medium, in the thick of which *contact* itself becomes even more the focus of what is being seen and thought than any definite object that might be perceived through it.

10 As Morris insists in her study of H.D.'s "cultural poetics," "Imagist theory privileges sight as fresh, accurate access to the exterior world." (Morris, 2003, 96) This "contact" of theory with its other—with a more embodied, less abstract, kind of discourse—provides a key to understanding how the poetic style of a writer like H.D. may have come to *body forth* a theory, or at least a theoretical frame of mind, that would not be clearly separated from the imaginative, in which the "image" would not be a detachable product of the imagination but quite the opposite: a constitutive medium allowing, reflexively, to actually see theory at work. Theory, by H.D.'s account in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, is not a tool that could help to see through and interpret the world; it should become the seeing and the seen at one and the same time, in a physical embrace to which the "super-feelers" of the jelly-fish give a metaphorical, and highly problematic, body. This liminal character of poetic thinking is essentially preserved in H.D.'s writings, allowing her to have a speculative access to concepts that remain at all times in close contact with the percepts (mostly, visions) through which she creates her poetic world: her theoretical discourse is not a discourse of detachment, it is not detached from its poetic object but in constant touch with it. In this respect, *Notes on Thought and Vision* is an attempt at setting up a continuum between mind and body, at finding "equilibrium, balance" between "[three] states or manifestations of life: body, mind, over-mind." (H.D., 1982, 17). The rather shapeless, protoplasmic unfolding of the

essay's paragraphs, like so many filaments of thought, is therefore instrumental for H.D. to weave her theorizing together with her felt experience. Like water and light passing through the impalpable body of the jelly-fish, H.D.'s clairvoyant practice of theory requires such a fluid, indeterminate textual strategy privileging hybrid forms: "Probably we pass through all forms of life," she avers near the end of *Notes*, "and that is very interesting. But so far I have passed through these two, I am in my spiritual body a jelly-fish and a pearl." (H.D., 1982, 50) H.D. favors a highly imaginative kind of theory which destabilizes vision and thought equally, imbuing each with the perceptual or conceptual qualities of the other and thus contributing to an "intermediate" writing mode, to take up the word she uses in the opening paragraphs of her novel *Paint It Today*, when she first describes her largely autobiographical character, Midget Deffredie: "The child itself, I would make dark cypress wood, rounded head, clawlike hands, an archaic Hermione, a nameless foundling sister of Princess Minnehaha, a bird or intermediate, of a lost reptile race [...]." (H.D., 1992, 3-4)[6]

II. "Clarid sequence of ideas"

11 In her letters to her writer friend (and at the time, putative lover) John Cournos written between 1916 and 1918,[7] H.D. insists on her own hypersensitivity, her almost supernatural capacity to feel, and in particular to see, things that remained imperceptible for most people. "My visual nature has been intensified," she writes him on October 31st 1916, "I seem to see colors *in relation* to people clearly now."[8] Hers seems to have been a case of acute hyperesthesia. What is more interesting here, however, is how deeply H.D.'s attempts at articulating a visual theory accounting for artistic creation rely on her actual visual experience. The intensification of feelings she writes about calls for a theoretical counterpart that might help the artist to "clarify" things or, as she writes in another letter to Cournos, probably in 1918, might allow her "to clear the ground":

> I must explain to you first that the novel is not intended as a work of art––at least, not as it stands. It is a means to an end. I want *to clear up* an old tangle. Well, I do not put my personal self into my poems. But my personal self has got between me and my real self, my real artist personality. And in order *to clear the ground*, I have tried to write things down––in order to think straight, I have endeavored to write straight. But I hope *to come clear* and then turn to my real work again.
> You must remember that writing poetry requires *a clarity, a clairvoyance almost*. I have been too weak to dare to be clairvoyant. I have tried instead to be merely sensible. I mean in the common sense of that word. In the long run, the clairvoyance is the only sanity for me.
> But in the novel I am working through a wood, a tangle of bushes and bracken out to *a clearing*, where I may see clear again.[9]

12 As can be seen from this letter and numerous examples in her poems,[10] the concept of clarity is central to H.D.'s discussion of vision as well as to her conception of theory as a rather paradoxical form of "clarification" which entails not so much an *elucidation* of experience—which would amount for her to a reduction of its aesthetic (sensitive, not "merely sensible") dimension to the intellect only—as a *clairvoyant extension* of experience into what she calls, in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, the "over-mind." This clairvoyant extension places the theorizing subject in an ambivalent position, at the cross-roads between keeping command over her own self-distancing and relinquishing it to this very distance; or, one might want to say, positioning herself between a "thin"

and a "thick" clarity, the latter being embodied—in the Cournos letter—by H.D.'s crossing out of the adjective "clear." As Susan Stanford Friedman notes in her reading of this particular letter, one can see "a rhetoric of duplicitous self-effacement" (Friedman, 1990, 34) at work here, which emphasizes such ambivalence. Crossing out the word "clear" implies that any clearness of sight is placed under erasure, is so to speak *clearly obscured*, thus making palpable the liminal nature of the kind of *clearing* in which she is trying to place her poetic thinking.[11]

13 It should be emphasized that such theoretical, self-reflexive positioning is recurrent in H.D.'s *poems* as much as in her more strictly critical writings; such a continuum bears witness to her ceaseless attempt at inscribing the theoretical on the obverse side of the creative, thus contributing to the emergence of a truly visionary kind of writing, insofar as it promises a new vision only by making its images "clear." One might want to use here H.D.'s own favorite trope of the palimpsest to explain the relationship she establishes between theory and poetry, thought and vision, each superimposed upon the other in an effort to clear the ground for such a renewed perception, and doing so by obscuring sight—each alternatively scraping out and re-inscribing the other. A good example of this poetic/theoretical strategy could be seen in fragment 21 of *Tribute to the Angels*. All along this second sequence of her book-length poem, H.D. tries to assess the conditions in which her vision of a universally redeeming principle—incarnated by a multifaceted presence she eventually calls "The Lady"—may appear. This particular fragment in the sequence attempts to "capture" (as on a photographic film) this presence in its own vanishing apparition, or more accurately, *as* its own vanishing "impression":

> This is no rune nor riddle,
> it is happening everywhere;
> what I mean is—it is so simple
> yet no trick of the pen or brush
> could capture that impression
> (H.D., 1973, 84)

14 In the almost abstract simplicity of this disappearance, the poet must accept the idea that the scraped surface of her palimpsest should not be re-inscribed with new signs, as was the case in the historical practice of the palimpsest; rather, the very whiteness of the "impression" itself is to be the renovated sign the poet has been waiting for all along. Such an impression—in the visual, scriptural, and psychological senses of the term—must be made beyond the "tricks of the pen or brush" and become pure vision; it should become illegible, inscribed on the brink of the invisible, erasing itself in order to be perceptible at all, as the remaining stanzas of the fragment suggest:

> music could do nothing with it,
> nothing whatever; what I mean is—
> but you have seen for yourself
> that burnt-out wood crumbling...
> you have seen for yourself.

15 The impression now verges on a mystical experience which can no longer be captured in words, let alone seen in visible signs. It retreats into a radical silence, here materialized by suspension dots, the stammering repetition of the same phrase emptying vision of all content, and most of all by the dash that comes instead of the articulated presence of meaning. Announced and withdrawn at the same time, meaning (dis)appears under the interrupting dash at the end of the line: "what I mean is—". The purely graphic mark of the dash comes to tear both the signifier and the signified

apart, thus becoming the ultimate incarnation of the palimpsest, in which the sign and the erasure of the sign are fused: meaning is both crossed out and imprinted on the page, aporetically implying that the content of "what I mean" is the absence, or the lack, of meaning. Meaning is here made literally, graphically "clear". The palimpsest towards which H.D. strives so arduously is an attempt at going beyond signs through writing. To confirm this paradoxical tension between presence and absence, she seems to rewrite the text of fragment 21 a little later in the sequence, in fragment 40. According to the logic of the deferred sign, the text is both the same and different:

> This is no rune nor symbol,
> what I mean is—it is so simple
> yet no trick of the pen or brush
> could capture that impression;
> what I wanted to indicate was
> a new phase, a new distinction of color;
> (H.D., 1973, 106)

16 The reader is here confronted with a rarefied version of the palimpsest, in which the same words and the same lines have been erased and then re-imprinted—literally, it is a re-impression—in a different configuration. By virtue of a deleted line (the second one in the first stanza of fragment 21, "it is happening everywhere"), the layout of the stanzas differs, thereby unframing the image, so that one can see the blank traces of the erasing process itself. This "new distinction of color" is tenuous, at best, since it relies on the way in which the poem is spaced out against the blank ground of the page, suggesting that the palimpsest consists in erasing a text only to rewrite *the same text* over the first impression. It is as though words were erasing themselves to resurface in a transfigured apparition. Neither "riddle" nor "symbol," the "overlaid photographic negative"[12] of such a subtle palimpsest allows the redemptive principle of The Lady to operate on the limit of what can be perceived. The poet's vision is therefore characterized by a radical uncertainty: the impossibility to see fully, to grasp meaning entirely, becomes a sure sign of a meaningful vision. This kind of "clarification" is not unlike H.D.'s re-inscription of the "over-mind" at the end of *Notes on Thought and Vision*: speaking of "over-conscious mind" does not substantially clarify the *meaning* of "over-mind"; but it does displace the visual contour of the concept by shifting its constitutive hyphen, thus changing the nature of the expected clarification. What H.D. "clarifies" is the perceptual dimension of her theorizing; she wants her readers to pay attention to the material shifts in the graphic inscriptions, superscriptions, various erasures and rewritings she performs. For this purpose, she envisions a new form of "clarity," which she chooses to characterize with an unusual adjective: hers will be "clarid" theorizing, rather than "clear" theory.

17 H.D. opens her essay on Kenneth Macpherson's experimental movie *Borderline* (1930), published in the magazine *Close Up*, with this sentence: "*Borderline* is chosen as the name of this new film; clarid sequence of ideas will show why." (Donald et al., 1998, 221). The adjective "clarid" appears to be rare enough not to be recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, even though it seems to be a favorite of H.D.'s.[13] Thus, for example, she uses it twice in her early novel *Paint It Today*. The first time, in a context that concentrates several of her perennial themes: the impalpable presence of a love principle combining body and mind, the composite visual and auditory perceptions signaling this presence without fully disclosing it, the uncertainty and ambivalence generated by such an immaterial materiality, all couched in images that recur

throughout H.D.'s oeuvre—the "morning and evening star" (Venus), the sea-shell, the subtle combination of music and color. At the end of the novel's first chapter, it is the realization on the heroine's part that she is physically and mentally attracted to the beautiful girl, Josepha, that makes Midget go from a sense of "clarity" to an obscure kind of "claridness":

> The past and the future, morning and evening star, hung there, a beacon in the darkness between this world and the future, the present and the future. She had, *through the clarity of her youth*, through the intensity of her passion, and through that fate or chance that had thrown her in Josepha's way at a curious psychological moment (at the moment when *she had been touched by the shadow of an understanding*, stirred by it, but not awakened), surprised a curious secret or found the door to another world, another state of emotional life or being, a life of being that contained the past and the future. Morning and evening star had met and swayed a second in the high air above the earth, morning and evening star had met and sung together. But it was *a tenuous though all so clarid singing*. It was the overnote of the tortured violin, the echo of the seashell. Midget, though the secret was to color all her life, was yet unsatisfied. She must find a link between the morning and the evening star (though she spent her life in seeking), and the earth she trod on. (H.D., 1992, 12-3, emphases added)

18 In typical H.D. fashion, Midget arrives here at the "all so clarid singing" of her revelation by working through and beyond "the clarity of her youth," only to realize that such claridness does not allow an illuminating feeling at all, but quite on the contrary amplifies the mystery of sensation. Just as the word *clarid* provides another, more rarefied, angle of vision from which to conceptualize "clarity," Midget has to pass through a "secret door" into another dimension of perception in order to account for the difference in her emotions. Trying to come to terms with an experience she can only feel without quite understanding it yet, amounts for Midget to finding "a link between" two kinds of light and clearness—albeit a "tenuous" one, not unlike the "long feelers" of the jelly-fish—thanks to which she will be able to decipher this experience, here embodied by "the morning and the evening star" of dual love.[14] Thus, H.D. accurately places her character in an "intermediate" position—the kind of borderline situation she must have felt herself in, regarding her own "emotional life or being," and which the encrypted autobiographical mode she writes in also expresses quite well —so as to suggest once again the dynamic continuum of thought and vision that she would "[spend] her life in seeking." What H.D. tries to recreate, in an admittedly cryptic way ("a curious secret"), is the sequence that places her character, her writing and herself, on a threshold from which she could simultaneously contemplate embodied thinking and disincarnated perception.

19 Any straightforward clarity of vision would obviously not be satisfactory here, and yet H.D. seems to be clinging to the possibility for some kind of "light" to give her access to the "theoretical" perception she hankers after. This would be an ideally balanced form of intermediate perception enabled by a combined body-and-mind entity for which she used several names throughout her works: the "womb-brain or love-brain that I have visualized as a jelly-fish *in* the body" of *Notes on Thought and Vision* (H.D., 1982, 22); the "series of shadow- or of light-pictures I saw projected on the wall of a hotel bedroom in the Ionian island of Corfu" in *Tribute to Freud* (H.D., 1974, 41); or "a certain other angle —/or perhaps it was a matter of vibration//that matched or caught an allied/or exactly opposite vibration//and created a sort of vacuum,/or rather a *point* in time—", an angle of light which concentrates the moment of revelation near the end of *Trilogy* (H.D.,

1973, 166, author's emphasis).[15] These paradoxical, almost self-defeating, characterizations of the structuring metaphor of light form a "clarid sequence of ideas" very much in the same way as what, H.D. argues in her description of *Borderline*, Macpherson's conception of filmed abstractions produces. For, in the film's "swift flashes of inevitable sequence," she sees "abstraction coupled with related abstraction." Abstraction, however, is only thus perceived because it is embodied by concrete realities:

> when Mr. Macpherson plays upon abstraction, it is in reference to some other abstraction. A telephone receiver of usual form and literacy, is dealt with, as abstraction, though it merges to the concrete when applied to succeeding abstraction of a stern chin line. The method of Mr. Macpherson is admittedly an 'abstract' method, but he is only satisfied when abstraction coupled with related abstraction makes logical dramatic sequence. (Donald, 1998, 223)

20 It is the peculiar medium of the motion picture, because it foregrounds the fluid relation between images and thereby introduces an ontological uncertainty as to their representational status, that allows any objective, static clarity to be replaced by a dynamic claridness, whose elucidating, illuminating, power relies on the transition (or sequence, or "merging," as H.D. implies here) from one perception to another. Rather than the "series of gig-lamps," we do get the "semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end": the concrete is the connective tissue (envelope) binding together abstractions that would otherwise remain as decoratively dead as gig-lamps, or as all-too-sharply delineated images in an imagist poem.

Conclusion: "Quivering of day-light"

21 It should come as no surprise that H.D.'s theoretical conceptions of artistic vision may be expressed in her long article on Macpherson's movie. As Lucie Petitjean explains, H.D.'s film criticism is but the natural outcome of her life-long musings on vision and strongly image-oriented creative writing, in prose and poetry alike: "The film theory that H.D. develops extols an aesthetics akin to imagism," she rightly writes[16]—akin, but not identical, to it. Indeed, one could argue that filmmaking acted for H.D. as an extension, or projection, of vision, thus becoming the ideal medium for the kind of embodied thinking after which she had been yearning. Far from clarifying her theory and practice of the image, it certainly reinforced the claridness with which she had theorized modernity from *Notes on Thought and Vision* onward.[17]

22 I would therefore like to suggest that what I have called H.D.'s "claridness" is clarity traversed by its own border, becoming a complex of uncertainty and speculative, even self-reflective, thoughts that always remain in close touch with the concrete, embodied and embodying experience of sight; and yet, this is a kind of sight which is not concerned whatsoever with any concept of "correct perception"—a fact which distinguishes her approach from the more conventional Imagist theory of perceptual "accuracy." For H.D., all theoretical clarification is irremediably shadowed by her passing through what she calls the "tangle" in the letter to John Cournos quoted above. H.D.'s theory zone is plunged in a kind of uncomfortable blur (including the generic one, of course), in which, as she says, "things about me appear slightly blurred as if seen under water" (H.D., 1982, 18). When one is steeped in this kind of visibility—looking at one's own sight, as it were—there is no possibility for retreat into the

rarefied sphere of being's presence as it is "alleviated" (or lightened) by the abstract light and lightness of truth.[18] Rather, there is a *reaching out into* the mess of perception, a haptic optics, of which the jelly-fish's feelers are the most striking metaphor in *Notes on Thought and Vision*.[19] In this image, the confusion induced by the jelly-fish's presence is inseparable from the claridness to which the "super-feelings" give access—which is, as H.D. writes, "fluid yet with definite body." This "definite body" is materialized by various erasures, of which the "writing on the wall," in the Corfu episode providing the matrix for H.D.'s rewriting of her sessions with Freud in the first part of *Tribute to Freud*, is the most complex avatar, combining as it does projection and reflection, light and shadow:

> I thought, at first, it was the sunlight flickering from the shadows cast from across the orange trees in full leaf and fruit and flower outside the bedroom window. [...] The pictures on the wall were like colorless transfers [...]. The first was head and shoulders, three-quarter face, no marked features, a stencil or stamp of a soldier or airman, but the figure was a silhouette cut of light on shadow, not shadow on light. It was a silhouette cut of light, not shadow, and so impersonal it might have been anyone [...]. The third follows at once or I now perceive it. [...] And this object is so simple yet so homely that I think again, 'It's a shadow thrown.' Actually, it could have been, as this shadow was, 'light' [...]. (H.D., 1974, 44-5)

23 The utter confusion of light and shadow in this passage is yet another illustration of how H.D. locates her clarid vision in an intermediary zone.[20] Contrary to the lightness/light of Heidegger's truth as un-concealment (*Unverborgenheit*), therefore, there is a *gravity* of thought for H.D.—"centered in the love-region of the body or placed like a fetus in the body" (H.D., 1982, 19)—which firmly anchors the over-mind to the female body. In H.D.'s experience of 1919, this gravity was of course inextricably linked with her own gravid state: having just given birth to her daughter Perdita (March 31, 1919), she conceived of the over-mind as the continuing presence of a body, *the* body, within the mind: in turn, she herself becomes the brainchild/womb-child of this over-mind. In her account, the jelly-fish literally *descends* like a cap over her mind and enwraps her body with its super-sensitive feelers. In these images, H.D. insists on the semi-transparent, palpable, presence of water as a necessary medium in which the artist needs to be plunged for her vision to be properly altered, thickened by its own materiality, weighted by its own tangibility—or, to appropriate a phrase Marianne Moore once used to characterize the style of Gertrude Stein, plunged in a kind of "perspicuous opacity."[21]

24 H.D.'s clarid vision is thus made possible by a "light'" that is not really illuminating, but revealingly blinding, opening up for the artist clairvoyant possibilities which opacify her theoretical gaze. Such a blinding light is to be found in many a poem by H.D. It is never so blindingly revealing, however, as in the little-known "Projector," a poem she published alongside her essays in *Close Up*, precisely, and which "names the Delphian Apollo the god of cinema and envisions him reasserting his domain on a ray of image-bearing, world-creating light." (Morris, 2003, 104) This poem in two parts explores the relationship between thought and vision in lyrical terms that have a powerful theoretical impact because they attempt to depict the kind of light each may throw upon the other. In the first part, H.D. tries to define a new quality of light, a "light that sears and breaks/us" (H.D., 1983, 353), a light thanks to which not only the objects of the outside world might be perceived differently, but in which the very nature of "thought" would be reunified in order to produce new (or renewed) perception:

in a new blaze of splendor
calls the host
to reassemble
and to readjust
all severings
and differings of thought,
all strife and strident bickering
and rest
(*Ibid.*, 349)

25 The "projector," we are meant to understand, works both from the inside out (mental projection of the perceiving subject onto the world) and—more unexpectedly—from the outside in, as the perceived world reshapes the mind by unifying thought. By trying to define a "just" kind of light, a readjusting light that could counter the divisive nature of a reifying theoretical gaze ("readjust/all severings"), the poet hopes to place her poem within the liminal space in which thought and feeling may be reunited, a place in which the stridence of "strife" characterizing the perceiving subject/perceived object split will be converted into the "stride" of the light god himself, a clearly Apollonian god who allows the poem to refer to itself as both projector and projection:

O fair and blest,
he strides forth young and pitiful and strong,
a king of blazing splendor and of gold,
and all the evil
and the tyrannous wrong
that beauty suffered
finds its champion
light
who is god
and song.
(*Ibid.*, 349-50)

26 H.D.'s integrative claridness thus returns theory to its visionary dimension, which brings "delight" to the seer: "waves sparkle and delight/the weary eyes" (*Ibid.*, 352), she writes in a witty pun liking light to de-light: this "Light [that] takes new attribute" (*Ibid.*, 349) brings the poet delight only insofar as it radiates negatively, creating in a further paronomasia a "Quivering of day-light" much akin to the blur of the jelly-fish experience or the seeing in crossed-out clearness:

light
from his bounty
proffers exquisite things,
quivering of day-light,
rush of delicate wings,
exotic flower
and reed
and underbrush,
tenuous fern
and bush.
(*Ibid.*, 355)

27 Against the stultifying, stultifyingly enlightened, gaze of many a theorist, therefore, H.D. proposes a rejuvenating de-lighted gaze, obscured by its own clearings and claridness, allowing her to reflect upon the nature of the image itself beyond the simplification of standard Imagist theory. In the canonical version of such a theory, the clarity of the image relates to "the Bergsonian faith in the artist's direct intuition of the

object. Where contemporary theorists hold that we see what we know, imagists insist we know what we see. They find in vision a release from a shared system of signs into a spontaneous, intuitive, unmediated apprehension of essences." (Morris, 2003, 97) For H.D., however, the jelly-fish is not merely transparent, and its fluid presence has "definite body" which cannot be apprehended as merely an essence. More radically, then, there is in her approach to vision the sense that it opens onto a para-theoretical position, or that the poet writing through the gift of the "over-mind" is endowed with a partly theoretical gaze. From this threshold zone of projective perception enwrapping the theoretical gaze, H.D. profoundly rematerializes thought, "like fish swimming under clear water." (H.D., 1982, 19)

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NOTES

1. They were so boldly innovative that, in fact, H.D. renounced the idea of publishing her text after Havelock Ellis, the British sexologist who was one of her mentors at the time, disavowed her writing experiment when she showed it to him, during her healing trip to the Greek Islands with Bryher in 1920. Consequently, *Notes on Thought and Vision* remained unpublished until 1982, more than twenty years after their author's death.

2. I am not in the least trying to suggest here that H.D. may have been directly influenced by Woolf. While she was in England in the 1910s-1920s, H.D. had no contact whatsoever with Woolf or the Bloomsbury Group; Woolf's dismissal of H.D.'s circle in general, and of Richard Aldington in particular, has been documented by Barbara Guest in her biography of H.D. (Guest, 2003, 33, 77). Upon learning of Woolf's suicide in 1941, H.D. was equally dismissive: "The general attitude was 'poor thing—she went through such a lot' but having been through so much, I myself, did feel stricken to think that she got away like that, just when really everything is very exciting and one longs to be able to live to see all the things that will be bound to happen later [...]." (letter to May Sarton, quoted in Guest, 265)

3. The H.D. quote is from *The Wise Sappho* (H.D., 1982, 67).

4. In French, "clairvoyant" translates into *médium*. In English, the word "medium" was formerly used with that sense, a word whose polysemy is helpful to designate the kind of "thickness," or substantiality, I am trying to describe here, making it even more relevant when applied to H.D.'s description of thought processes.

5. Among the many examples of remarkably hyphenated words in H.D.'s works, one cannot fail to mention the fourth fragment of *The Walls Do Not Fall* in *Trilogy*, the often-quoted "sea-shell" poem in which, among others, the "jelly-fish" of *Notes* resurfaces under the guise of an "octopus-darkness." (H.D., 1973, 9) As for the "pearl-of-great-price" concluding this same poem with a triple hyphen, it is already mentioned at the end of *Notes*, although without the hyphens, and used as a metaphor for "all the spiritual energy [...] concentrated in the middle of my fore-head, inside my skull" (H.D., 1982, 51).

6. The motif of the "intermediate" is strongly linked in this novel (unpublished in H.D.'s lifetime) to the author's discovery of her homosexuality, since the story tells about the growing and devastating love Midget (H.D.) feels for Josepha (Frances Josepha Gregg).

7. Later, there was to be a dispute between them, and Cournos would nurture bitter feelings towards H.D.

8. H.D., letter to John Cournos, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, YCAL MSSA24, Box 17, Folder 581 (author's emphasis).

9. H.D., letter to John Cournos, July 9th 1918 (?), Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, YCAL MSSA24, Box 17, Folder 582 (emphases added). The penultimate word was crossed out by H.D. herself.

10. One might think in particular here of the central motif of white, blinding light in *Trilogy*, and the special kind of clarity of vision it brings about in the book's second sequence, *Tribute to the Angels*, as for instance in the final fragment: "And the point in the spectrum/where all lights become one,//is white and white is not no-colour,/as we were told as children,//but all-colour" (H.D., 1973, 109).

11. In a similarly ambivalent position, H.D. claims at the end of *Notes on Thought and Vision*, "I think at last I have my terms clear" (49), but the so-called clarification consists only in speaking of "over-conscious mind" rather than "over-mind."

12. In the short-story "Murex," H.D. has her heroine Raymonde Ransome see "faces overlaid now one another like old photographic negatives and faces whirled on and on, like petals down, down, down as if all those overlaid photographic negatives had been pasted together and rolled off swifter, swifter, swifter from some well controlled cinematograph." (H.D., 1968, 157).

13. The word seems to have been in favor in the early 20th century. One can find it used, for instance, in *The Purple Cloud*, a 1901 novel by a certain M.P. Shiel, and in "Variations on a Seventeenth Century Theme," a poem by the Canadian writer Duncan Campbell Scott, in his 1921 collection *Beauty and Life*. More relevantly, perhaps, it belongs in the critical vocabulary of British art critic and poet Adrian Stokes (1902-1972), who was close to Ezra Pound and started his writing career by publishing essays in *The Criterion* in the late 1920s.

14. The homoerotic dimension of this love is suggested by the fact that "morning and evening star" refer to two visual incarnations of *the same* celestial body, the planet Venus—or the same love (and love of the same) lit and seen by two different lights.

15. For a brief discussion of the implicitly negative nature of this "*point* in time"—if one hears the French negative adverb in the word *point*, see Cazé, 2014, 40-1.

16. Doctoral dissertation in progress, on "Imagination and the Imaginary" in H.D., prepared under my supervision.

17. The cinema has been largely considered to be the epitome of artistic modernity, a medium in which the creative and the theoretical dimensions constantly interact. This hybrid dimension was no doubt appealing to H.D., who found in *Close Up* the ideal occasion to write on the threshold of theory: "Because the writing in *Close Up* crosses many borders," writes Anne Friedberg in her introduction, "—between literary prose and theoretical writing, between avant-garde manifesto and journalistic *feuilleton*, between film production and literary modernism—it effectively overruns the canonical boundaries of disciplinary republics." (Donald, 1998, 4). Such a generic uncertainty was appropriate to the expression of the perceptual/conceptual mix H.D.'s writings promoted.

18. I have in mind here the combined metaphor of light and lightness Martin Heidegger uses in his deconstruction of ontology when he tries to "clear up" our understanding of what is being "clarified" and "cleared away" when philosophy tries to understand being. This "clearing"—in Heidegger's original word, *Lichtung*—is also an "alleviation**,"** since the German word derives from *leicht* rather than *Licht*; it therefore implies a kind of relinquishing into the clearing of unhiddenness (see Heidegger, 1962, 133).

19. The "haptic" is of course a central Deleuzian category which he elaborates upon in his study on Francis Bacon, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Following art historian Aloïs Riegl, Deleuze sees the origin of the haptic in Ancient Egyptian art: "Bas-relief brings about the most rigid link

between the eye and the hand because its element is *the flat surface,* which allows the eye to function like the sense of touch; furthermore, it confers, and indeed imposes, upon the eye a tactile, or rather *haptic,* function." (Deleuze, 2003, 122). This Egyptian background uncannily echoes the poetics of H.D., and the intersecting influence of Ancient Egypt and classical Greece upon her own conception of vision.

20. It would be interesting to explore further whether this fusion of light and shadow is dealt with or not as a *racial* issue in Macpherson's *Borderline*, in which the leading roles are played by two black actors (Paul Robeson and his wife Eslanda) and a white actress (H.D. herself). Blurring the color line in a black and white film also contributes to defining the "clarid sequence of ideas" as a theoretical mode for H.D.'s own critical writing; it is one of the major concerns in the first part of her essay on the film: "though threads are woven in and through the fabric, white into black and black into white, Pete and Adah [played by the Robesons] must inevitably remain 'borderline', whether by their own choice and psychic affiliations or through sheer crude brute causes." (Donald et al., 1998, 221)

21. Marianne Moore, "Perspicuous Opacity," *The Nation* 143 (24 October 1936), 484-5. Reprinted in *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, ed. by Patricia C. Willis, New York, Viking, 1986, 340.

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